# Voluntourism (1)

1. Read the comment and answer the questions.

## Save the world – a little?

It's in the word: volunteering + tourism = voluntourism. And tourism is a business that makes money for a lot of people and that is a major factor in the economies of many countries. 'Voluntourism' is the word used for the business that volunteering has become.

Every year, hundreds of thousands of young people from rich western countries go abroad to a poorer country to try and help some good cause[1], and also to travel, usually after they've just finished school.

The natural reaction of any person with a heart when seeing a person in need is to feel pity[2] and to want to to help. The trend has increased because media reports and photos of people in need are easily spread. Social media help to publicise and share them. These young people want to "do good". But in spite of[3] all the good intentions[4], that can still be problematic. The way that voluntourism works possibly isn't the best way to help. In fact there has been more and more criticism lately, that it can actually make things worse.

One criticism is that the volunteers are not in a position to and are not able to deal with the true problems in their host countries at all.

For one thing, they are only there for a very limited period of time. And most volunteers do not have the special skills that would be truly useful for people in need. They may teach some basic English or help with construction work, but they don't have the background to give medical help, for example. And realistically they can't be expected to have these skills. After all they are 'amateur' helpers.

There is also some concern[5] that voluntourism might distract people from the deeper roots of the problems – the economical, political, historical and social developments that lead to poverty. It takes long, hard and often even boring work to make a change in these areas, and that's just not as interesting and immediate[6] as, for example, handing out food to poor children.

What is more, the idea of going to a poorer country to 'save' people there, is itself at least

questionable[7]. It automatically makes you think of them as 'victims'. Especially people from countries that have contributed[8] to the problems in poor countries, like former colonial powers, should be aware[9] of that.

So, does voluntourism actually do more damage than good? I don't think that there are any easy answers to that question. But I think there are a few ideas that could help to make it more useful, for both the volunteers and the people they are trying to help:

First of all that means lower expectations: The volunteers should realise that they are not personally going to save anyone from poverty. But that's OK.

And it's nice for young people to get an opportunity to experience a different culture in a different part of the world. What's important, though, is that this experience can and should be a starting point for them to develop a deeper interest in and a higher level of respect for the cultures of their host countries.

Ideally that could lead to a better understanding of the causes of the problems there. Maybe that will bring about changes in their actions in their normal, everyday lives at home, which might be more useful in the long run – like paying attention to where and under what conditions the products they want to buy were produced, and developing political awareness and making well-informed decisions about what policies they want to support.

[1] cause – *Zweck*; [2] pity – *Mitleid*; [3] in spite of – *trotz*; [4] intention – *Absicht*; [5] concern – *Sorge*; [6] immediate – *unmittelbar*; [7] questionable – *fragwürdig*; [8] to contribute – *beitragen*; [9] be aware – *sich bewusst sein*; [10] policy – *politische Linie*

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# Voluntourism (2)

2. Answer the questions.

1. Who takes part in volunteering pogrammes and where?

2. Why are volunteering programmes attractive for volunteers?

3. Why does the author think voluntourism isn't very helpful?

4. What does the author recommend?

6. Give your opinion: Do you agree with the comment? Why (?)

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